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With another summer of beach closings looming, two Illinois congressmen unveiled the bipartisan Great Lakes Water Protection Act establishing a federal deadline to end sewage dumping in the Great Lakes.

Sponsored by U.S. Reps. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, and Dan Lipinski, D-Chicago, the legislation imposes fines on persons who violate the Act to be paid into each state's Clean Water Revolving Fund. The fund promotes the construction of sewer infrastructure to protect the Great Lakes.

"We drink from this source and our children swim along the shores of Lake Michigan. We must put a stop to the poisoning of our water supply," Kirk said at a Chicago press conference. "More than 27 million Americans depend on the Great Lakes for their drinking water. Cities along the Great Lakes must become environmental stewards of our country's most precious freshwater ecosystem.

"As the shores of our Great Lakes become more densely populated, I am pleased to join with Congressman Lipinski to introduce bipartisan legislation to set a date certain to end sewage dumping in America's largest supply of fresh water," he added.

While Illinois communities have improved their sewer infrastructure to prevent the dumping of partially treated raw sewage into Lake Michigan, other cities along Lake Michigan have been slow to upgrade their sewer infrastructure and continue to pollute the lake.

The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District dumps millions of gallons of partially treated raw sewage into the lake after heavy rains. In May 2004, more than 1.5 billion gallons of sewage went into Lake Michigan.

Although there was no direct correlation between Milwaukee's sewage dumping and the closing

of Chicago-area beaches in 2004, Cook County beach closings nearly tripled from 213 in 2003 to 613 in 2004 and Kirk said he is particularly concerned over the beach closings in the 10th Congressional District the past two years.

Already this year, Lake County's Lake Michigan beaches have been closed at least 11 times because of high E. coli bacteria counts.

Kirk said the total number of Illinois Lake Michigan beach days affected by closings rose from 391 in 2003 to 790 in 2004.

"The number of beach closings in my district in 2004 far outnumbered the days of summer swimming," Kirk said. "This trend must be reversed and this legislation is a step in the right direction."

Kirk said other cities dumping sewage into the lake include East Chicago, Gary and Michigan City in Indiana, and Benton Harbor, South Haven, Holland and Grand Haven in Michigan.

Kirk and Lipinski's legislation gives cities until 2026 to build the full infrastructure needed to prevent sewage dumping into the Great Lakes. Those who violate EPA sewage dumping regulations after the federal deadline will be fined \$100,000 for every day they are in violation.

Kirk and Lipinski will introduce the Great Lakes Water Protection Act this week. They are also original co-sponsors of the Great Lakes Restoration Act and the Save Our Waters from Sewage Act.